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INAUGURAL ADDRESS,
DELIVERED AT THE
OHIO WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY,

AT ITS
ANNUAL COMMENCEMENT, AUG. 5, 1846,

BY
✓
HERMAN M. JOHNSON, A. M.,
PROFESSOR OF ANCIENT LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE.

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PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES.

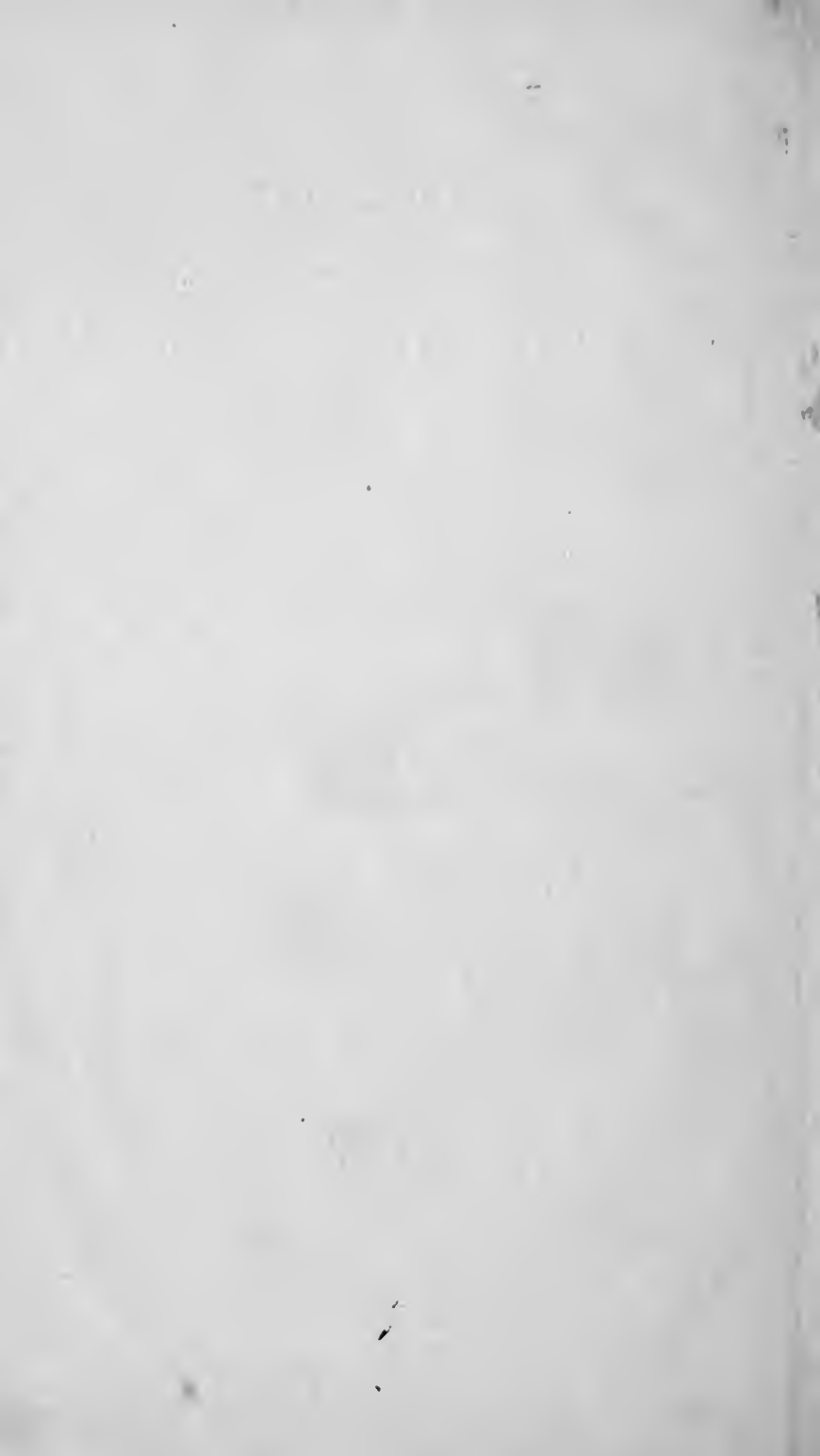
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CINCINNATI:
PRINTED AT THE METHODIST BOOK CONCERN.

—
R. P. Thompson, Printer.
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THE haste in which this Address was composed, at irregular intervals snatched from the closing scenes of the term, must be its apology for imperfections. It was designed simply to define, as due to the Curators of the University, the views of the writer respecting that department of instruction which he is appointed by them to conduct. Knowing that its interest must be mainly limited to those who have already heard it, it is only from respect to the unanimous request of the Board of Trustees, and the solicitations of other friends of the institution, that the author yields his reluctance to see it obtruded further on the notice of the public.

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INAUGURAL ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES, AND VISITORS OF THE
OHIO WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY:

THE authority of prescriptive usage, has imposed upon those who are called to fill the chairs of public instruction in the liberal arts, that they should give an early exposition of their views of the doctrines or sciences in which they are appointed to labor. The propriety of this usage it is not our province now to question.

It will not be expected by the audience, that we attempt, on such an occasion, any thing like a popular harangue. The character of our subject—which is simply to define our views of the *nature, the rank, and the scope of linguistic studies*—effectually precludes this, even if it were otherwise desirable.

I shall consider it no part of my office to enter any plea in favor of the study of the ancient languages, or institute arguments to prove their utility. The doubts concerning them so often met with, and the reluctance to the labor required, we have generally found to be of such a nature, as did not seek to be enlightened by argument, and could not be overcome by words. More enlarged views of man's sphere of action, and experience of his capabilities and wants, are the only sure corrective of these erroneous notions.

But this experience, we are sorry to know, often comes to youths of the best talent only when the most precious season of improvement is past; and they are left to regret, when too late to repair, the folly of having formed to themselves a definition of *utility* so illiberal, and so antagonistic to the best interests of man, and the advancement of science and general truth.

Nor have we to do with those who, in their fondness for experimental radicalism, seek to unsettle established customs, simply because they are established—who believe to find wisdom rather in experiment of the present than in experience of the past; and who would proscribe, from a course of *American* education, all classical studies, because, forsooth, they are embraced in the institutions of aristocratic Europe! It shames us to know that our country can

have produced men, and still more, can tolerate in high places, men, who blush not to stand as the advocates of such captious crudities.

Before entering directly upon our subject, we premise, that the immediate object of systemized instruction is two-fold—the acquisition of knowledge, and mental discipline. These two constitute education, and may not be separated. Could the latter be gained without the former, the mind were like a curious and well-made machine, without hands to guide it, or materials to work in it. If the former without the latter, it were a store-house of all sorts of commodities lumbered together, without skill to arrange or craft to use them:

Happily, we cannot acquire knowledge to any great extent without thereby gaining something of culture and discipline of mind. To acquire, implies study or observation; to acquire much, a *habit* of study or observation, or both; and he who has that habit established, is not far from being able to reason; and to reason we understand to be the highest prerogative of our intellectual nature.

By *reason* we mean, of course, not the ability to construct a syllogism with Aristotelean accuracy and precision—not that dialectical acumen that can

“Distinguish and divide

A hair 'twixt south and southwest side;

On either which it can dispute,

Confute, change hands, and still confute;”

but we mean, to exercise all the reasoning faculties in perfection—to apprehend readily and clearly—to distinguish every false from a true issue—to take a large and comprehensive view of the subject in all its relations—to form a judgment discreet and free from error, and that shall guide to right action.

This great end—to reason justly and act rightly—is not gained by slight study or partial knowledge; for if to do this in a perfect way, implies that the mental powers be so under the control of the will and an enlightened conscience, as never to err wantonly, it also implies that the mind be so furnished with knowledge from every human source, as not to err from ignorance. And while none may hope to attain absolutely to such a standard, it is that toward which all true education tends. We take it, therefore, as a thing

granted, that every young man of generous impulse—of high and liberal aspirations, will lay hold eagerly on every means of instruction within his reach, as contributing undoubtedly to the perfection of his mental powers.

I have said that knowledge cannot be acquired, to any great extent, without gaining thereby something of culture and discipline of mind. This is in the general true. On the other hand, such exercises as induce a rigid discipline, do not always bring a corresponding increase of knowledge. One of the readiest writers known in modern times, and a profound scholar, and who gained in his lifetime a wide-spread fame, almost unprecedented in the annals of literature, attributed his unparalleled abilities to the fact that he was compelled in boyhood to the irksome task of writing in an attorney's office regularly, and for several hours a day. The copying the same legal document, with its barbarous phraseology, for the thousandth time, added nothing to his stock of ideas; but it gave him a habit of patient application, which was, in later years, of immeasurable advantage—which was, in fact, the foundation of his surprising facility of labor, and the unfailing success of his felicitous execution. And the prince of Athenian orators, when he shut himself up in his cave, and disfigured his form that he could not go abroad, and sat down to the labor of copying with his own hand not less than eight or ten times the entire history of Thucydides, submitted to that painful drudgery not, as is generally said, so much for the sake of imbibing the spirit and style of that sententious writer, as to gain that power of application, and the habit of close, uninterrupted thought, by which he was able afterward to gather, with a strong arm, wide seas of knowledge into the great reservoir his hand had scooped, and pour forth, at will, the lava tide of his eloquence and burning patriotism, in whatsoever channel he chose.

In view of this principle, some studies which are, to many minds, and for many pursuits in life, little better than the tread-mill task of the copyist, are wisely retained in the common systems of instruction. Thus, to determine the position of a Greek accent, or to demonstrate a theorem in Euclid, or to solve a problem in fluxions, may be, for all practical purposes, as barren of immediate results, as the most barren thing imaginable; yet the labor they require may contribute a capability of productiveness like the sources of an unfailing fountain.

It may be remarked further, that different studies induce different habits of thought, and modes of reasoning. Some inculcate the spirit of positiveness and dogmatical certainty; and if cultivated exclusively, would unfit the mind to appreciate the numberless contradictory or qualifying circumstances of real life. Others, again, deal only in *probabilities*; and if their influence be not corrected by a due intermixture of the more exact sciences, the mind would come to lack stability and confidence in its judgments.

It is also to be observed, that some studies, besides the great objects already named, may be said properly to *cultivate* the mind—to wear off the asperities of nature—to humanize and refine the feelings—to impart the consciousness of higher perfection to the whole mental machinery and operations, while others are, in this respect, to say the least, quite neutral.

From these preliminaries, we return to our original proposition—to consider, first,

The nature of linguistic studies. In all the sciences, and all the pursuits of life, there are initiatory requirements, which are of worth only as instrumental to the ultimate object. The mechanic must have his tools, and the farmer his implements of husbandry, obtained often at considerable expense of time or money: he must have acquired a skill in the use of them by a tedious apprenticeship, and must distinguish them by names. The physician has his technicalities; the lawyer his formulas, the naturalist his nomenclature, and the mathematician his figures and definitions. So in acquiring a language, the classification of words, according to their use; their appropriate designations; their forms and inflections; the idea they represent; the definitions of principles; the laws of derivation and collocation: all these must be *learned*. These constitute the *grammar*, which is, simply interpreted, the *letter* book or *primer* of a language. This, it will be seen, is mainly the mere task-work of the memory, and is best performed in childhood or early youth. There is a period, before the reasoning powers are developed, in which there is a pleasure in the mere acquiring of words, and ideas, and facts, without knowing well, or thinking of the value of such acquisition, just as there is a physical pleasure to the child in exercising his limbs without any object than merely that pleasure which it gives him. The memory is also more tenacious

in this season than afterward, when the mind is more occupied with reflection.

There are other studies, it is true, which may be accomplished in this season. Geography, which is but a system of facts, is easily acquired. Also the whole range of facts in natural science and natural history; in fine, *facts*, universally—whatever does not require reasoning, or metaphysical discrimination, or abstruse demonstration. History is read with avidity, and its facts retained. Poetry is committed to memory for the music of its rhythm, not its sentiment.

While the youth is thus learning the grammar and definitions of words in another language, he is becoming acquainted, imperceptibly, with its standard literature. He is charmed with the recital of her historians; his energies are roused by the pathos of her orators; the discussions of her philosophers, and select portions of her best poets are gathered to the store-house of his memory, as food for mental nourishment and growth in riper years. We think, therefore, that the child should, at an early age, be made familiar with the rudiments of the sciences, and especially of the principal languages it is designed he shall learn. He who fails of this privilege, has to perform, in mature years, with labor that frequently becomes irksome, if not disgusting, that which might have been done in the proper season with ease and pleasure.

It is no valid objection to this course, that the learner would thus load his memory with many things which he could not comprehend. If they are fixed in the memory, they will be comprehended as the mind becomes sufficiently mature. Knowledge thus laid in store, is not the less knowledge because not immediately made available: it is only latent, and will, in due time, be developed. In the moment of collision, or great emergency, it starts suddenly into power, as the spark leaps from the smitten steel. And in the hours of silent labor and reflection, the hidden truths come forth from the mists of childhood, in their beauty and brilliance, as when the clouds that have overspread the heavens begin to disperse, the stars of night burst unexpectedly upon the vision, one after another, till the whole firmament is filled with their radiance. If there were no latent heat in the steel, the flint might be worn to dust and elicit no spark. If there were no stars behind, the clouds might withdraw

and leave the heavens a vacant sphere of blackness. We say, then let all the latent capacity of the mind be filled while it may.

But we are speaking thus far of studies strictly rudimental! In noticing the range of studies pertaining to this department, it will be perceived that the pupil soon enters on a field of wider interest than that of conning grammatical forms, or chasing stray radicals through the columns of a lexicon, or whipping refractory particles into construct order. Certain other things are essential to an understanding of the authors read. To read history, in any language, requires a geographical knowledge of the countries for the times treated of. To read the orators, poets, and philosophers, requires a knowledge of the history of that people; the geography of their country; their government, and their received systems of religion.

But to regard these merely as helps to understand the text-books of the class, is placing in secondary rank that which has a claim to stand in the first. What is the ultimate object of this labor of learning? Not, certainly, to supply man's physical wants—not to minister to the gratification of sense. The farmer may not be able to guide the plough, or wield the spade any the more expertly for knowing there is such a people as the Chinese, or that we bring cloths from Britain—that Homer wrote poetry, or that our fathers fought for a free government. It suffices for him, as an animal, that he can dig in the soil, and knows the way to market, and that he busy himself with learning so far only as to know the price of corn. Nor is the blacksmith's or the carpenter's arm strengthened, or his coffee sweetened by these studies. They have no direct pertinence whatever to these material interests. Man has physical wants that must be satisfied, and every man must labor that they may be satisfied; and the advance of science shall contribute increased facilities for accomplishing that purpose; but all that is secondary to the great objects of life. And when we see one beginning to count up the net value, in dollars or cents, of this or that particular study, we say, 'Alas for that soul! he has a hard lesson yet to learn before he knows what is life. The scales are on his eyes, and he has not yet discovered that man is a ghost and not an animal; he could not see that Diogenes was greater in his tub than Alexander at the head of armies; yet so manifest was his superiority as to excite the envy of that conqueror of the world. And till one has a spiritual eye somewhat opened, it were of little

worth to attempt, by arguments, to remove his *utilitarian*, as he calls them, scruples about the propriety of studies; for we should think meanly of ourselves to use the sordid dollar argument, which we once heard from one, who, mistaking his restlessness of nature for ambition, and a petty vanity for magnanimity, was declaiming volubly in favor of universal knowledge. For thus: while he was in college, his institution was furnished with a teacher of Hebrew. Not knowing what use he might have for it, he seized the opportunity to learn that language. Afterward, when teaching in a neighboring city, he was applied to by one who wished to become his pupil to learn Hebrew; and thus he got a tuition fee of fifty dollars, which he should otherwise have lost; *therefore*, he would advise all young men to study Hebrew! Science is degraded by such advocates! The world is injured by their egregious folly!

But we return to the question. What is the ultimate object of all this labor of learning? We understand it to be, to bring man acquainted with his mental nature—its powers and its weakness—and to perfect all his capabilities, so far as it can be done by acquisition, and reflection, and reasoning, and so prepare the man for more acceptable obedience and service to his Maker.

The old maxim abides the test of the world's experience—"The proper study of mankind is man"—and how shall we study man but in his works? How detect the laws of mind but in the phenomena of its operations? Whatever, therefore, serious men have done or attempted to do, or even the acts into which they have been hurried by their folly or madness; in fine, whatever exhibits any new phase of humanity, becomes an object of interest.

And what particular bearing on this great object have the studies of the department we are now considering? They open to us the door of antiquity; they lead us back through the walks of the ancient world, casting everywhere a light upon our pathway more or less clear; they introduce us to the companionship of those who, in past ages, have lived so as to commit their names and their labors to durable remembrance, and give us a living and human interest in their works; they do, in fact, what human science can do toward solving the great problem of man; and enable us to see, in the light of Revelation, where human science fails, and prepare the mind to receive and profit by the truths derived from that sacred source.

It will be perceived, then, that we intend much more than to teach the rudiments of grammar, and to construe and render into schoolboy English a few authors in Latin and Greek. These will constitute the basis of a system of operations which *should* range wide as the works of man; and though this is not possible, by reason of man's limited powers, it will be our intention to give them the utmost extension of range practicable.

I have already spoken of geography as essential, in its secondary rank. Together with this, the student of antiquity is to be made acquainted with the history of geographical science—to learn in what measure, and by what means, man slowly extended his knowledge of the form and diversity of the earth on which he dwells. This will embrace a notice of many important historical events: the early enterprises of commerce, of migration, and warlike adventure. And this can all be done in a few brief lectures, with the aid of proper charts, when the classes shall have become familiar with the systems of statistical geography furnished for our use.

History, too, is to be known. Not merely so much as shall serve to illustrate the text-books in hand; but the history of, at least, all the prominent and cultivated nations of antiquity, with as much divergence into the investigations of inferior tribes as circumstances shall admit; and that not in its facts merely, but in its philosophy. The facts of history furnish material for the profoundest speculation and reasoning; and have engaged the studies of some of the greatest scholars of modern times; and if they cannot reduce the subject to the exactitude of a science, there is, in what they denominate, “The philosophy of history,” that which shall continue to interest the mind the more, the more it advances in knowledge and maturing of reason. And these things are to be familiarly discussed to the comprehension of the classes. And with this must be connected a survey of the history of historic literature, especially in those two languages which we usually denominate the *Classic*.

And in poetry. Besides the specimens which the student may be able to read in the brief time of a college course, he must study the science of poetry, and apply its principles, and form his judgment, and perfect his taste in whatever pertains to that pleasing art. So in oratory. So in philosophy. He must learn and weigh, in the deliberations of his own judgment, that which the ancients have

taught concerning the deepest spiritual interests of man, as the light of their wisdom and the perfection of their morals. And though the student cannot *study* the literature of other nations as he is expected to do the Latin and Greek; yet should he have presented, in the way above suggested, a distinct outline, if not a well-filled sketch of the literature of all nations whose history can be gathered.

But that to which his studies more directly tend, is the science of philology, embracing philosophical grammar and criticism. This subject is attracting more attention yearly, and its full importance is but beginning to be appreciated as its principles come to be understood. This proposition may seem strange to some who had fancied that the study of the *dead languages* was about to cease. Yet such is the fact; the science of philology, both absolute and comparative, is strictly of recent origin. Nor need it be thought strange, that man should have used speech for so long a time without a true knowledge of its character. So had he the earth under his feet from the beginning—so drank he the breezes of heaven, and warmed him by the fire he had kindled; and yet, of the earth on which he trod, of the air he breathed, of the water he drank, of the fire that warmed him, and of all the objects of sense—those which earliest attract the attention, and are most obvious to inspection, he had remained, till quite recently, as profoundly ignorant of the constitution and real nature, as he now is of the dark scroll of eternity that preceded the creation of our world. But these times called modern, have grown bold and strong. Nature is no longer a goddess shrouded in the obscurity of some venerable sanctuary, suffering herself to be but distantly approached, and responding ever with evasion or ambiguity. The ministers that wait at her altars, have interrogated with an authority that has claimed a decisive response. They have unveiled the mysteries, and brought forth from her arcana the wonderful things she had kept hid from of olden time. And from the multiplied series of facts thus deduced, new and distinct sciences have been clearly digested. Simultaneous with these movements that have brought such results from the material world, the same earnestness of investigation, and the same power of analysis, have been applied to this mysterious agency which forms the means and medium of communication between spirit and spirit. Language is the instrument of man's metaphysical nature, as material objects are of his physical: it is the Heliconian

fountain which embalms the thought in its uttered freshness, and preserves it in immortal beauty. By the labors thus newly directed, the subject of interpretation has been relieved of much of the absurdity which, during the reign of monkish illiteracy, had been heaped around it.

The connection, also, between the different families of languages, and their surprising analogies, constituting the science of comparative philology, is not the least interesting part of these varied studies.

The importance of this science is abundantly manifest by the light it has already shed on many portions of history otherwise obscure, or wholly lost; and by the certainty it gives of correct interpretation of ancient writings, especially those that contain the principles of our holy religion.

You see, then, something of the range we intend to give the study of this department; much of which, for lack of suitable text-books, must be accomplished by lectures.

We intend a course of lectures on the *history* of language—its origin, gradual developments—its confusion, and the multifold diversity it has exhibited. This will require a notice of those early emigrations of great bodies of people; and it will be seen that the wanderings of obscure tribes can be traced by the fragments of their language, which they have left scattered here and there, and which have been gathered, and compared, and digested by the inquisitive patience of the modern philologist. It must, also, include a notice of the origin of written language, and the different methods invented to represent to the eye articulate sounds, and an examination of their comparative merits.

To this must follow a course on the philosophy of language: a subject full of deep interest when the mind has become sufficiently mature, and accustomed to analysis and metaphysical discrimination.

Third: another course on literature—that of all the nations of antiquity; so far as it can be gathered, more especially that of Greece and Rome. This must be exhibited in its separate departments, historically, and with critical examination.

To this might, most profitably, be appended a continuation, in the same method, of the lectures on literature, coming down through all the nations of modern Europe to the present time. But this would be a performance of so great labor, and as not necessarily belonging to my department, in respect to it, I offer no pledges.

Other series, less extended, on several other subjects, as government, the philosophy of history, geography, &c., will complete the circuit of what is to be done by lectures.

Thus have I given that which was the main object of this address, as concisely as seemed practicable—an outline of the studies in that department of the University in which I have the honor to labor. It is somewhat more comprehensive than has hitherto been carried out in our American colleges; but in drawing this hint, I trust I have not permitted my fancy or zeal to carry me beyond discretion. Of this I have good assurance, in the judgment of my respected colleagues, and some other gentlemen of science and classical attainments to whom it has been submitted.

It remains to notice, briefly, some of the incidental advantages that accrue to the studies of this department, aside from those we have already named as the more direct object.

I. *As to the discipline of the mind.* We have already said, that, in this respect, the influence of different studies is quite diverse.

Mathematical science, by reason of the fixed and positive nature of its processes, and its conciseness of expression, induces a habit of close, consecutive thought. Its importance is incalculable; for nothing else could supply its lack. In this respect, it stands unrivaled. The danger is, that it should hebetate the imagination, and destroy the vivacity of the mind. It must be the most effectual corrector of verbosity and straggling fluency, the curse of many a gifted youth; for it admits no latitude of expression. Its phrases are compressed to the smallest possible dimensions, and stereotyped. The danger would be that it might induce a style too little varied, and barren of ornament. As its reasoning is demonstration, its conclusions are certain. The habit carried into other things is dogmatism. In all these respects, the influence of classical studies is widely different; but we think not less beneficial. Instead of the positive nature of its processes and conclusions, the exercise of translation is to the tyro often in uncertainty: at the best, a probability. This, though not so agreeable to the mind, as being less satisfactory, has this advantage, that it is nearer to the experiences of practical life; and this in especial, it inculcates the habit of regarding whatever is done, as not absolutely finished: though done well, it may be better: though praised, there is chance for

improvement: that there is yet a higher point of perfection, which may be approximated by labor and repeated trial.

Another comparison would show the extreme diverseness of these studies in another respect, in which, perhaps, both are equally important. The child that cannot count five, may tell you, when he has two apples in one hand, and two in the other, that he has four apples; but so soon as he comprehends that two and two make four, abstract from individual objects, he has mastered the essential principle on which true mathematical science rests. From that point on, it is but the extension and repetition of the same exercise of computation or reasoning in abstractions. In translating, on the other hand, a single sentence, every variety of intellectual operation is requisite: the exercise of memory; the apprehension of a simple fact; the grouping together many facts; comparing, deliberating, judging, analyzing, synthesizing—all.

II. *The acquisition thus gained, of practical value.*

1. Accuracy in the use of our own language. This point cannot be gained, in any near degree, without the study of Latin and Greek. Fluency may not be wanting, but facility and accuracy combined, is not found but by this means.

2. The practical acquaintance it gives one of other sciences. The pupil may learn from the proper text-book the theory or system of rhetoric. But in the reading, as he does in his classical studies, of the best models, and every variety of composition, he has a practical lesson in rhetoric from beginning to end, in which the mind can hardly fail to become imbued with all that is essential in rhetoric, except the form and name, and without which the theory were of little worth.

There was no Aristotle before there was a Homer. There was no Quinetilian before there was a Cicero and a Virgil. There can be no forming a theory, or system of rhetorical principles, till the mind is already a critic in every kind of style and elocution. And with every learner, we apprehend, the process by which he becomes, if at all, master of the subject, is much the same.

So in regard to mental philosophy. One cannot make great progress in the art of interpretation and criticism, without gaining, at some time, some acquaintance with the philosophy of mind. He has constant occasion to observe the laws which govern it, if he has learned them, or a chance and almost a necessity to detect them, if

he has not. The practice, therefore, of critical reading and translation is a continuous study in metaphysics.

III. *It improves the taste.* This would be true of any reading, and especially a systematic and extended reading of the classic literature of any language, as necessarily as constant association with good society will improve the manners of the rustic. To fill the mind with all noble sentiments of the good and earnest of all times—to enjoy a daily companionship of the greatest minds that have illustrated the literature of the world, is certainly no small advantage. But especially in the productions of the ancients, there is a simplicity of thought, and a strength and freshness of feeling, and unsophisticated naturalness, that forms a most wholesome antidote to the fastidiousness and finical sentimentalism or artificialness to which there is so strong a tendency in the present age. That we are correct in this opinion, is seen, in that the men of truest taste have ever been found among those who have drunk deep from the fountain of the ancient muses.

We might further assert, with safety, that not only are these important advantages gained by the means here indicated, but this is the only means left us by which they can be gained in any perfect degree. Have there been, then, in these modern times, none eminent for intellectual strength and perfection of taste and judgment, without this consumption of years in the study of wearisome antiquity? No great poet, no great orator, no great historian, none great in any of the walks of literature? We answer, Not any, nor will be, nor can be. The youth who turns aside from the instruction of these classic exemplars, thinking to shorten thereby the way to distinction and usefulness, effectually cuts himself off from any just hope, if not possibility, of gaining that eminence toward which he looks. But are there not some men of such transcendent genius as to spurn the trammels to which ordinary minds submit, and to whom such discipline would be rather hurtful than advantageous? Nay, there is the fatalest delusion that delights to sport itself with human imbecility. A delusion, too, often countenanced and fostered by those who should be the correctors of its wantonness. It is true, the process of events brings upon the stage of action every now and then some prodigy of eccentric or ill-balanced mind, the fire of whose genius astonishes and dazzles a gaping world. These are the comets—the meteors of our mental system. Like them,

they glare with a momentary brilliance that consumes itself in its own fires, or shed, in their erratic course, a baleful influence over the world, boding and creating pitiable varieties of intellectual disease and pestilence. Proper culture might have rendered them a blessing to their kind, enabling them to shed a steady and healthful light, like the fixed or regularly revolving luminaries of heaven.

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